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Report on the activities of the United Nations Sudano-Sahelian Office

Report of the Administrator

SUMMARY

The present report is submitted in accordance with Governing Council decision 91/41 of 20 June 1991. The report summarizes the activities of the United Nations Sudano-Sahelian Office (UNSO) during the 1991-1992 period and considers the implications of the thorough review of UNSO carried out in the second half of 1992, in light of the decisions of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED). This has resulted in a redefinition of goals and the reorientation of the major areas of concentration of UNSO activities, emphasizing its role as a dryland activity centre serving countries in Africa affected by drought and desertification, especially those in the Sudano-Sahelian region, and as the focal point in the UNDP system on issues concerning drought and desertification.

I. INTRODUCTION

1. The present report was prepared in accordance with UNDP Governing Council decision 91/41 of 20 June 1991, which requested the Administrator to report biennially on the activities of the United Nations Sudano-Sahelian Office (UNSO).

2. It should be read in conjunction with the report of the Secretary-General, on "Development and International Cooperation: Combating Desertification and Drought" (A/47/393), prepared in response to General Assembly resolution 46/161 of 19 December 1991. The report highlights some of the major requirements for the implementation of Agenda 21 as regards drought and desertification.

3. It should also be read in conjunction with the report of the Administrator, "Environment and Development" (DP/1993/03), prepared in response to Governing Council decision 92/16 of 26 May 1992, which requests the Administrator to report to the Governing Council on "proposals on specific ways and means to combat desertification and drought, including strengthening the coordinated operations and the effectiveness of the United Nations system to meet this objective, taking into account the role identified for the United Nations Sudano-Sahelian Office by the Preparatory Committee of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development".

4. UNSO promotes the sound management of natural resources in 22 countries of the Sudano-Sahelian region, in order to assist Governments and communities to tackle drought and desertification, which are the major environmental issues constraining sustainable development. During 1991 and 1992, the programme focused on three major themes: the strengthening or creation of national capacity in planning and coordination for the improved management of natural resources; operational field activities; and preparations for the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED). These activities were supported by public information and sensitization activities, combined with resource mobilization.

5. General Assembly resolution 44/228 of 22 December 1989 listed, for UNCED consideration, the "protection and management of land resources by, inter alia, combating deforestation, desertification and drought" as environmental and development issues of major concern.

6. The prominence given UNCED to drought and desertification is reflected in the decisions set out in chapter 12 of Agenda 21, including the proposal for a convention on desertification. The implementation of these decisions now requires close attention and follow-up. The present report, therefore, reviews UNSO activities over the last two years, in light of the provisions of UNCED, and considers the changes and actions necessary for the future.

II. MAIN ACTIVITIES OF UNSO DURING 1991 AND 1992

A. The United Nations Conference on Environment and Development

7. General Assembly resolution 44/172 of 19 December 1989 "urges UNSO to assist the countries of the region with their preparations for the 1992 Conference and with the resulting follow-up activities". UNSO was closely involved in supporting the 22 Sudano-Sahelian countries in their preparations for UNCED and, following the conference, turned its attention to evaluating what the implementation of Agenda 21 entails both for the countries in the region and for the modus operandi of UNSO. It is also laying the groundwork for that implementation.

8. The aim of UNSO during this preparatory process was to assist the Sudano-Sahelian countries to take full advantage of the opportunity presented by UNCED to focus on the interdependence between environment and development and to ensure that drought and desertification were given adequate attention on the UNCED agenda.

9. To this end, UNSO assisted countries in the creation of national committees for UNCED, the preparation of national reports and the promotion and organization of UNCED-related sensitization activities. UNSO also provided funding for the participation of one delegate from each of the 22 countries in regional and international UNCED preparatory meetings and at the conference.

10. Through the Joint Support Committee, established with the Permanent Inter-State Committee on Drought Control in the Sahel (CILSS) and the Intergovernmental Authority for Drought and Development (IGADD), UNSO organized subregional meetings to facilitate a concerted approach to common concerns. These meetings, held at Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, in February 1991, and at Cairo, Egypt, in July 1991, led to the adoption of the Sudano-Sahelian Platform for Action on UNCED negotiations and beyond: a contribution to the African Common Position.

11. As a founding member of the Joint secretariat of organizations supporting Africa in the UNCED process, UNSO/UNDP, together with the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), the Organization of African Unity (OAU), the African Development Bank (AfDB) and UNCED, helped organize and took part in various preparatory activities, leading to the meeting of African Ministers of Planning and Environment, held at Abidjan, Cote d'Ivoire, in November 1991, which adopted the African Common Position.

12. At the international level, UNSO collaborated closely with the UNCED secretariat. As part of the Preparatory Committee Working Party on Land and Agriculture, UNSO prepared two reports: an "Assessment of Desertification and Drought in the Sudano-Sahelian Region, 1985-1991" and "Alternative and Sustainable Systems of Production and Livelihood in Marginal Lands". UNSO also contributed substantially in the development of programme areas on drought and desertification for chapter 12 of Agenda 21.

Development and implementation of strategies for natural resources management activities to tackle drought and desertification

13. UNCED stressed the importance of adequate, harmonized institutional capacity for environmental planning and monitoring activities. Over recent years, UNSO has developed and implemented a programme of assistance to plan, coordinate and monitor the sustainable use of productive resources, based on ensuring an adequate national institutional or interministerial capacity in the 22 countries to coordinate the planning, preparation and implementation of natural resources management activities. UNSO currently supports these strategic framework programmes in 17 Sudano-Sahelian countries, at various levels of implementation, depending on the country-specific situation. UNSO financial support for these exercises averages between $200,000 and $400,000 each, over a one- to two-year period.

14. UNSO also supports the ongoing process begun in 1990 of harmonizing the activities of key multilateral organizations involved in natural resources and environmental management programmes in the region. Further harmonization meetings were held at UNSO headquarters in April 1991 and November 1992 with the organizations involved, namely UNSO/UNDP, UNEP, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the World Bank and the World Conservation Union (IUCN). The April meeting concentrated attention on individual country reviews and agreed on joint activities, including missions, in order to synchronize ongoing activities. The November meeting identified aspects of the strategic planning process that needed modification in light of the UNCED decisions. Consideration was also given to ways in which strategic frameworks can contribute to implementing the concept of sustainable development. It was agreed that further meetings will be organized by UNSO on a regular basis.

15. In 1992, in cooperation with UNDP, the World Bank and AfDB, UNSO launched a Joint Regional Programme Facility, based in Abidjan, Cote d'Ivoire, to strengthen national capacities to integrate the environmental dimension into all aspects of development planning. A network of African experts and institutions will be established to foster technical cooperation among African countries.

16. In parallel with the above-mentioned activities, UNSO has continued to develop programmes in the field of environmental information systems (EIS). A more demand-driven approach for strengthening national capacity, reinforcing the database and creating national networks for ecological monitoring has been developed, based on experience gained in assisting the Ecological Monitoring Centre in Senegal.

17. New EIS activities are being initiated in Burkina Faso, Cape Verde, the Gambia, Ethiopia, Mali, Niger and the United Republic of Tanzania. These include workshops and forums to support network development, resource mobilization and, eventually, training and material purchase for data processing and information production. Such activities will support the Sustainable Development Network initiative by reinforcing the natural resources management database. At the same time, with UNSO support, the Senegal Ecological Monitoring Centre is developing into an independent institution, which will also serve as a regional training centre.

18. Other initiatives to further regional cooperation to strengthen capacity in information system development include UNSO collaboration with the Sahara and Sahel Observatory (SSO) programme initiated by the Government of France. An SSO/UNSO "Survey of Observation Structures", published in 1992, gives a comprehensive summary of the major activities in ecological monitoring related to Africa being carried out at centres in 10 North African and Sudano-Sahelian countries, as well as in Canada, Europe and the United States of America. A seminar on the technical aspects of EIS is scheduled for May 1993, in cooperation with SSO.

Other operational activities

19. As part of the drive to combat desertification and drought, UNSO concentrates on projects and programmes geared towards improving sustainable land productivity through integrated resource management, working through agronomic and pastoral land-use systems currently in use in the Sudano-Sahelian region. As stated above, this is very much in line with the thrusts of Agenda 21 in relation to drought and desertification activities.

20. The aim is to help rural communities to improve their standard of living and become self-reliant through rehabilitating, developing, protecting and managing their natural resources. Community development activities are supported by such innovations as the establishment of local-level land management plans, village credit schemes, revolving funds and increased seed and seedling supply.

21. During 1991 and 1992, 52 new projects were approved in all Sudano-Sahelian countries except Somalia, at a value of $22,385,501, in agro-pastoral development, land protection, desertification control, land rehabilitation and environmental education and sensitization activities. Support per project varies widely, from $15,000 to $7 million.

22. Innovative projects for desertification control that involve strengthening local-level capacity for agricultural and rangeland management have been formulated for Benin, Kenya, Niger and the Sudan.

23. Two of these, in Benin and the Sudan, seek to combine anti-desertification efforts with carbon sequestration schemes, through better village-based land use systems, to prevent the over-exploitation of marginal lands. Both projects, worth a total of $4 million, were approved for Global Environment Facility (GEF) funding in December 1992.

24. Among ongoing programmes, the UNSO/Swedish International Development Agency Sahel Programme, with a total budget of more than $25 million over five years, involves village land-based management in Burkina Faso, Niger and Senegal. In partnership with the beneficiaries, new replicable methodologies and techniques based on past experience have been developed for incorporation into plans for the sustainable development of natural resources, both nationally and in areas with similar ecological problems. As part of this programme, a report being prepared on the innovative concept of village land management developed over 10 years in this area will be an important contribution to desertification control.

Information and sensitization activities

25. During the biennium, an extensive range of information and sensitization activities was carried out, complementing the UNSO work programme and fulfilling various functions.

26. "Information Notes for UNCED" were prepared to assist delegations from the Sudano-Sahelian countries to the Preparatory Committee session in March 1992 and to the conference, by presenting the issues involved in readily accessible form.

27. Publications on the status of drought and desertification and on alternate means of production have been widely distributed in order to increase knowledge and awareness of the issues. They are also relevant in the context of the development of a future work plan for UNSO.

28. A "Report on UNSO: 1990-1991" and a multi-image video production on UNSO activities were produced for a wider audience within the affected countries, the United Nations system and the donor community, for information and resource mobilization purposes.

29. To disseminate useful results based on field experience, UNSO prepared two, more technical publications, the first on "Reforestation: the Ethiopian Experience, 1984-1989" and the other on "Sand Encroachment in Mauritania".

30. Similarly, UNSO supported the making of a prize-winning and widely distributed film entitled "Rivers of Sand", based on a successful project that rehabilitated Bourgou grass in the inner delta of the Niger River. A series of short UNSO-funded videos, to be produced by UNDP/Azimuths, will feature UNSO projects. The first, on protecting the Road of Hope in Mauritania against sand encroachment, is complete and another, on gum arabic rehabilitation in the Sudan, is in preparation.

31. Other activities to increase awareness of the issues included missions to donors undertaken as part of the implementation of the UNSO strategy to mobilize resources. Also of interest is UNSO support to the resource mobilization effort targeted at the private sector for contributions to the Drought Fund established by OAU.

32. With a view to addressing drought and desertification as they relate to the existing themes of GEF, UNSO collaborated with the UNDP Regional Bureau for Africa and the Bureau for Programme Policy and Evaluation (BPPE) and UNEP in organizing a workshop in Nairobi, Kenya, in October 1992, for experts on desertification, land degradation and deforestation, to consider the scientific and technical links and impacts of these problems on the global environment. The findings were presented to the Participants Assembly of GEF in December 1992 and are being published.

B. UNSO after UNCED

Activities

33. Existing UNSO activities, concentrating on assistance to the development of strategic planning frameworks for natural resources management, community-level project activities and information and sensitization efforts, are fully relevant in the context of the six programme areas defined in chapter 12 of Agenda 21. Certain programme areas, however, which have not so far received priority, need increased attention, particularly drought preparedness and management.

34. In addition, Agenda 21, chapter 38, paragraph 27, calls on UNSO, operating within the UNDP system and in cooperation with UNEP, to assume a major advisory role, to participate effectively in the implementation of chapter 12 and to use the experience gained in the Sudano-Sahelian region in all other affected countries, particularly those in Africa.

35. The recognition of the need for immediate renewed action on desertification and drought issues, together with the provisions set out in Agenda 21, pose a major challenge to UNDP to follow up on Agenda 21, in order to secure resources and ensure programme implementation.

36. In spite of the generous support of the international community to the efforts of the Sudano-Sahelian Governments to combat the effects of drought and desertification, the results have been disappointing. The effects of repeated droughts and the adverse international economic environment have reinforced the impression that conditions are worsening.

37. Major changes have occurred in international assistance for environment and development. These include increased attention to linkages between environment and development, a renewed focus on desertification as an important issue on the international development agenda and the realization of the need for long-term planning and intervention rather than the emergency relief measures of the past. In addition, there are more bilateral and multilateral programmes active in dryland management and a major reorganization within the United Nations system is under way.

38. In the light of the above and of the decisions of UNCED, including those relating to the role of UNSO, thorough in-house discussions were undertaken by UNSO in consultation with BPPE in order to determine the direction of future UNSO activities.

39. These discussions took into account the findings of an independent report of the recent review of the trust funds commissioned by BPPE. This report concluded that UNSO has an important role to play and is well suited to support the implementation of chapter 12 of Agenda 21, by way of its unique experience in working in drylands, particularly in supporting some of the operational activities envisaged. It also stated that UNSO needs to maintain its own organizational identity, within the UNDP system.

40. As a result of this process of internal review, as well as of informal contacts with donor and recipient countries and other partners, and in order to

consolidate further UNSO activities and contribution in its mandate area, future UNSO activities will be based on the following:

(a) Greater support to policy, planning and enhancing capacity at national and regional levels in areas with direct impact on drought and desertification;

(b) More emphasis on enhancing the technical basis of programme development to ensure that resources are used more efficiently and for greater impact at the local level;

(c) Reduced involvement in direct project management, inter alia, minimizing the risk of duplication with other agencies and at the same time facilitating the consolidation of the institutional experience of UNSO.

41. Such streamlining implies that UNSO will strengthen its functions in programme development and advisory and technical backstopping, thus facilitating coordination and advocacy on drought and desertification issues. An important element in its functions will continue to be servicing the UNDP system in order to enhance UNDP activities concerned with drought and desertification, specifically in contributing to the implementation of Capacity 21 and the integration of natural resources management in country programmes.

42. Accordingly, UNSO will focus on achieving the following goals in drought and desertification-stricken countries in Africa, with particular attention on the Sudano-Sahelian region:

(a) A coordinated intervention in the field of drought and desertification, through a programming dialogue among the countries, subregional institutions and United Nations system organizations;

(b) Increasing capacity in local communities to manage natural resources on a sustainable basis with a view to addressing drought and desertification;

(c) The integration of drought and desertification into the socio-economic development planning process, together with capacity enhancement at the national level;

(d) The integration of activities to implement chapter 12 into national and regional programmes concerned with desertification and drought; and

(e) Facilitating the transfer and flow of resources for drought and desertification-control activities in the Sudano-Sahelian region.

43. To achieve these goals, UNSO will focus on the following areas of concentration:

(a) Supporting processes to develop and implement strategies for natural resources management which address the local problems of drought and desertification;

(b) Promoting drought preparedness and enhancing drought management capacity in the Sudano-Sahelian region;

(c) Promoting integrated local-level natural resources management as a way to address drought and desertification;

(d) Promoting drylands research and development networking;

(e) Promoting the development of information systems to support natural resources management;

(f) Providing special support for the implementation of chapter 12, including the negotiation of the convention to combat desertification.

44. Following on the work of UNCED, the General Assembly, in resolution 47/188 of 22 December 1992, established an Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee for the elaboration of an international convention to combat desertification in those countries experiencing serious drought and/or desertification, particularly in Africa, with a view to finalizing such a convention by June 1994.

45. This convention is expected to provide the requisite programme framework for strengthening national action and regional and international cooperation for combating desertification.

46. In this context, UNSO, on behalf of UNDP, and in close collaboration with UNEP and the rest of the United Nations system, will have an important role in supporting the negotiation process.

47. In addition, UNSO is called upon to "assist the countries covered under its mandate in their preparations and participation in the negotiating process and to mobilize resources for this purpose".

48. UNSO has already begun supporting the African countries in the preparatory negotiation process, to assist them to arrive at a joint understanding on the priority issues and objectives. A consultative meeting, organized by OAU, with support from UNSO, was held at Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, in October 1992.

Modus operandi

49. Servicing the UNDP system as an operational focal point on issues concerning drought and desertification. As recommended in the report on environment and development mentioned above (DP/1993/03), UNSO, on behalf of UNDP, will be supported to serve, inter alia, as the UNDP focal point on desertification and drought.

50. As stated earlier, this role has been the subject of recent discussions within UNDP, in particular with UNDP regional bureaux and the BPPE Environmental and Natural Resources Group, with whom UNSO works closely. Fulfilling this role includes the following:

(a) Ensuring the integration of desertification and drought issues in the UNDP country programme process and assisting in the development of special projects and programmes as needed;

(b) Helping improve the quality of UNDP desertification control projects and participating in the evaluations of selected projects;

(c) Assisting in Capacity 21 implementation; and

(d) Promoting dryland concerns in UNDP work and providing advice as needed.

51. In its role as foc point, UNSO also coordinates overall reporting on drought and desertification-related activities, including the submission of reports to the Commission on Sustainable Development.

52. Relationship with UNEP. The present close links with UNEP, in particular with the desertification control department and the Global Environmental Monitoring System (GEMS), will be reinforced. The UNDP/UNEP joint venture agreement to support the implementation of the World Plan of Action to Control Desertification in the Sudano-Sahelian region ensures, through UNSO, the substantive collaboration of UNDP and UNEP in drought and desertification-related activities. It contributes seed financing for project identification, formulation and monitoring, pilot projects, support to regional activities and organizations, information and sensitization and training. The UNEP Governing Council, in recognition of UNSO work and of the importance of the joint venture agreement, doubled programme support to UNSO for the 1992-1993 period. Bearing in mind the post-UNCED responsibilities of UNSO, however, action has been initiated to revise the approach to the joint venture programme and to consider increasing the administrative support level to UNSO as well, which has remained the same for the last 13 years.

53. Regional cooperation. The close cooperation which already existed with CILSS and IGADD has been greatly strengthened, particularly through the preparatory process for UNCED. This cooperation will continue and be reinforced. Cooperation will also be sought with such other subregional organizations as the Southern African Development Community (SADC) and the Maghreb Arab Union.

54. In addition, ongoing working relationships with such regional African organizations as OAU, ECA and AfDB will be further developed.

Resources

55. Contributions to UNSO general resources increased over recent years, from $2.9 million in 1984 to $7.8 million in 1991. In 1992, however, financial support from donors declined considerably. This decline must be seen in light of reductions in resources available for multilateral organizations and, more specifically, in light of the need for a redefinition of the roles of the different players involved in environment and development.

56. The tasks outlined above, however, presuppose the availability of adequate financial resources for UNSO and a firm commitment and resource mobilization strategy from UNDP to support UNSO efforts.

57. Because of demands for substantial additional resources implicit in the decisions of Agenda 21, UNSO has an important role in assisting the dryland

countries in Africa to develop programmes for resource mobilization aimed at combating their most serious environmental and development problems.

58. Consequently, UNSO will look to traditional and new donors for support for the new strategies and programme outlined above, which will be coordinated with such major initiatives as the SSO, supported by the Government of France. This complementarity is acknowledged by a renewed commitment by the Government of France to UNSO general resources.

59. UNSO will also assist in developing programmes to be submitted at round-table conferences and other pledging mechanisms, for funding through such initiatives as Capacity 21, GEF, bilateral and multilateral funds, regional and subregional development banks and the private sector. This funding will not need to be channelled through UNSO, nor will the office be involved in the implementation or day-to-day monitoring of the activities financed in this way.

60. There will be a continuing need for financial resources to supplement joint venture support and maintain the work programme described above. In particular, the extension of the advisory role of UNSO, to other dryland areas of Africa will depend on the availability of additional resources.